

ADVISORY GROUP

THE VERDERERS' COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP SCHEME

Meeting Held at the Queen's House on 10 November 2009 at 10.00 a.m.

MINUTES

Present	<p>Rachel Green</p> <p>Oliver Crosthwaite Eyre</p> <p>Jackie Kelly</p> <p>Richard Manley</p> <p>Richard Stride</p> <p>Phil Marshall</p> <p>Jane Smith</p> <p>Ian Stone</p> <p>Rhys Morgan</p> <p>Colin Draper</p>	<p>Natural England – Team Leader Hampshire & Isle of Wight</p> <p>Official Verderer</p> <p>Natural England</p> <p>Commoners' Defence Association</p> <p>Commoners' Defence Association</p> <p>Head Warden, The National Trust, Mottisfont Abbey</p> <p>Forestry Commission –Planning Officer</p> <p>Co-ordinator – New Forest HLS Application</p> <p>Hampshire Wildlife Trust/New Forest National Park Authority</p> <p>Verderers - Scheme Manager</p>	<p>(Chairman)</p> <p>(Secretary)</p>
Apologies	<p>Simon Weymouth</p> <p>Emma Rigglesworth</p>	<p>Forestry Commission Ecologist</p> <p>New Forest National Park Authority</p>	

Item (a)	Discussion and Decisions (b)	Action (c)
1. Introduction	1.1 The Chairman opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.	
2. Minutes of the Last Meeting	2.1. The minutes of the last meeting were approved.	
3. Update by Scheme Manager	<p>3.1. Payment. Payment has been received from the RPA for the Scheme year just ended (2008/9) – a month earlier than usual. It is intended that payments will be sent out to members by the end of the month.</p> <p>3.2. Membership. A total of 446 commoners, including 31 new members, joined the Scheme this year. The introduction of the 25% option, under which members were invited to reduce the number of animals they turned out by up to 25% and still receive payment on their full entitlement, has met with some success. Of the 336 members who were eligible for this option and who returned application forms, a total of 101 turned out 497 less animals than in 2004; 149 members turned out exactly the same number; and 86 turned out 508 more than in 2004 – thereby cancelling out the reduction of those who turned out less. But, without the reduction, the total on the Marking Fee Register would have been very nearly up to 8,000: the actual figure is 7,473, little changed from last year.</p>	

<p>4. Pony/Cattle Ratios</p>	<p>4.1. Pony/cattle ratios remain satisfactory, with cattle constituting 34.5% of the total number of commoning stock turned out on the Forest (against a minimum target of 25%).</p>	
<p>5. HLS Agreements – National Trust and other HLS Holders on Adjacent Commons</p>	<p>5.1. The meeting noted the minutes of the recent Sub Committee meeting with regard to the arrangements between the Verderers and HLS holders on adjacent commons. Since that meeting, agreement has now been reached on the relationship with the National Trust regarding their HLS. Essentially, the Verderers will continue to fund and make their Scheme available to all commoners, as at present. For their part, the National Trust will seek to address local issues of over/undergrazing through the introduction of individual management agreements. It was acknowledged that this is a sensitive issue as such agreements could reward those who are causing overgrazing problems: the National Trust will avoid providing inappropriate financial incentives which could be interpreted in this way. Their intention is to provide an incentive for long term commitment and investment by commoners in farming methods that will avoid or minimise any detrimental effects on the commons. The National Trust also notified their intention to contribute to the cost of the Agisters’ payroll, in recognition of the Agisters’ work in support of commoning on the National Trust commons. Similar conversations will be held with HLS agreement holders on other adjacent commons.</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>6. New Forest HLS: Sustainable Commoning/ Grazing Element</p>	<p>6.1. The meeting was briefed on the background and progress of the New Forest HLS application. If this is successful, the current Stewardship Scheme agreement will end 3 years early, in March 2010 and will be replaced by an HLS agreement with the additional funding associated with that. The proposal for this was put forward by Natural England because of the availability of funding for a new 10 year agreement in 2010 and fears over the availability of funding for a replacement agreement if this opportunity is missed, in 2013. The Verderers were duly briefed and accepted the proposal. Because of the wide ranging demands of an HLS; the demanding management arrangements for the funding associated with it; and the risks involved in delivering the objectives, it was decided that the Scheme should be managed by a board on which the other 2 main organisations with responsibility for the Forest, namely the Forestry Commission and the New Forest National Park Authority, are represented. The Verderers will be the signatory for the Scheme but responsibility will be shared by all 3 parties under the terms of a legally binding memorandum of agreement. A condition for the Verderers agreeing to the change to an HLS is that £40 per hectare will be ringfenced for supporting commoning. That will provide a larger amount than the sum available under the present Scheme, although it is intended that most of the additional money will be used to provide long term benefits rather than simply increase current levels of payment to commoners. In that regard, one of the aspirations of the Scheme is to provide a lasting legacy for the Forest that will contribute to commoning long after the HLS agreement comes to an end.</p>	

6.2. The HLS will cover the same area as the current agreement and will have the scope for inclusion of additional land – such as those inclosures which currently remain fenced off to stock. These will first need to be included on the Rural Land Register – which typically can take 9 months or so. Natural England will discuss this with the Forestry Commission Estate Manager in the New Forest – Mark Street.

6.3. Ian Stone has been employed on a short term contract to coordinate the HLS application. He has arranged a number of meetings to seek and collate proposals for the Scheme under the different objective headings as follows:

- **Biodiversity**
Date, 16th November
Venue, Verderers Court
Time, 10.00 am to 12.00 noon

- **Resource protection**
Date, 19th November
Venue, Library
Time, 10.00 am to 12.00 noon

- **Historic Environment**
Date, 24th November
Venue, Verderers Court
Time, 10.00 am to 12.00 noon

- **Access and Education**
Date, 25th November
Venue, Queen’s House Library
Time, 1.00 pm to 3.00 pm

- **Landscape**
Date, 26th November
Venue, Verderers Court
Time, 10.00 am to 12.00 noon

- **Monitoring**
Date, 30th November
Venue, Library
Time, 10.00 am to 12.00 noon

6.4. The chairman recorded the thanks of Natural England for the work done by the Official Verderer in taking this forward, and to the Verderers for their support.

6.5. A short briefing note outlining the background and arrangements for the HLS, provided by Natural England for the Commoners’ Defence Association, is attached for information.

<p>7. Update on the Land Management Team</p>	<p>7.1. Rhys Morgan briefed the meeting on the work he is currently doing with a number of land owners in the Forest. This includes ELS/HLS applications and liaison with farmers, both in the Avon Valley and in and around the Forest, with a view to identifying the availability of any ‘back-up’ grazing to support commoning. He is also continuing to assist with the production of farm opportunity records. A decision is expected soon on the appointment of a team leader for the Land Management Team. Once the team is fully established, details will be published and leaflets will be distributed to commoners/land owners in the Forest. It was suggested that these could be included in correspondence sent out to Scheme members by the Verderers’ Stewardship Scheme manager; they could also be included with the next Verderers’ Newsletter (no date has been set for this yet).</p>	
<p>8. AOB</p>	<p>8.1. Rick Manley advised the meeting that he is standing down as a CDA representative on the Advisory Group – although he may continue to attend in his role as a consultant for the National Trust HLS. Graham Ferris who has taken over as CDA chairman will attend future meetings.</p>	
<p>9. Date of Next Meeting</p>	<p>9.1. It was agreed that the next meeting will be held during the first week in March 2010: date and time to be confirmed.</p>	

10 November 2009

C F R DRAPER
Scheme Manager
Secretary

Distribution:

All members
All Verderers

Update for CDA on current status of CSS to HLS transferral

What has happened so far;

- Natural England had a large budget this year for CSS to HLS transferrals so approached Verderers to find out if they would be interested in transferring early – about May time this year Russell spoke to Oliver
- Verderers said yes at this time but it was thought it would be just the same as original remit – early June
- Late June local NE was asked if the NF could make good use of more money and if Verderers would be interested in taking on wider remit HLS, NE took back to Verderers
- Verderers said yes but would have to hear more, Des Sussex was brought in by local team and had early meetings to pull something together
- In the mean time NE got agreed with Natural England fixed hectareage rate for forest and indicated that the grazing element was worth £40/ha in keeping with National rates
- July Des and Rachel went back to Verderers to see if they would be interested, said yes as it represented a fantastic opportunity for investment into the forest, but due to the scale of remit and size of financial obligation recognised they may not be able to do it alone, so Oliver and Rachel had meeting with Barrie Foley and Mike Seddon to discuss this. An SLA/MOA is now being drawn up to ensure joint delivery of project
- Oliver took new proposal back to Verderers court in October and Verderers agreed to new partnership approach on two conditions, that the £40/ha was ring fenced/underwritten for a grazing/commoning scheme to be managed by the Verderers and that the overarching objectives for the scheme had to be agreed by them
- both of these were agreed by the shadow partnership board so Oliver and Mike Seddon have signed the intention to apply form and sent to Natural England, also at this meeting after the Verderers decision the board decided to employ someone to help the partnership put the application together
- We now have till January to agree the details with the partners and draft an agreement for signing before 1st March 2010, so money can be available by October 2010 for next members payments

Other issues

The scheme is to be referred to as The New Forest HLS Scheme

The scheme will cover the area in the current CSS

Payments for CSS members will remain unchanged for 2010

The extra money above the current CSS levels will be used to invest in commoning and open forest livestock management

The Verderers will be signatories but will have a separate agreement with FC/NPA for increased delivery and reduced liability

It will be important for this scheme to work closely with the other adjacent commons HLS agreements and the Land Management Advice service which will be setting up and supporting estate and commoners holdings agreements

Ian Stone is now employed by the partnership to hold workshops looking at the projects for year 1 and 2 that are realistic

Exactly how much we will bid for will depend on what we get back from the workshops as what we can realistically achieve

Defra has yet to agree with us as to what it can be spent on we are going to give a presentation with ideas in December to get principals

Administration is capped at 15% per annum for the total amount received from NE/Defra